

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-11

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8589

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 3754

STADIS////////////////////////////////

FOR NEA

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDIP, XF, SY, US
SUBJ: SYRIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD POSSIBLE MIDDLE EAST TRIP
BY SECRETARY

REF: STATE 165464

1. CULTURAL PROGRAM NEGOTIATIONS ARE AT A POINT WHERE TEAMS HAVE REFERRED CHANGES AND MODIFICATIONS TO THEIR RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENTS. DEPENDING ON RAPIDITY AND FLEXIBILITY OF WASHINGTON'S RESPONSE TO DAMASCUS 3655, BELIEVE WE COULD HAVE CULTURAL PROGRAM READY FOR SIGNATURE BY MID-JULY OR EARLIER. IN SYRIAN EYES, HOWEVER, THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT AT THE LEVEL OF AN AGREEMENT BUT RATHER AT THE LOWER LEVEL OF AN AGREED LIST OF ACTIVITIES UNDER THE CULTURAL AGREEMENT NEGOTIATED BY WORKING LEVEL OFFICIALS IN THE CONCERNED MINISTRIES AND SIGNED BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION IN A LOW KEY CEREMONY WITHOUT OTHER MINISTERS PRESENT.

2. A BETTER BET MIGHT BE THE DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL FAIR. AS YOU KNOW, DR. IMADI HAS INVITED SECRETARY KREPS TO ATTEND AND WE ARE CURRENTLY WAITING FOR THE RESPONSE WHICH WE UNDERSTAND
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FROM HER PREVIOUS CORRESPONDENCE WITH AMBASSADRO MURPHY WILL BE NEGATIVE. THE INAUGURAL CEREMONY OPENING THE FAIR WILL BE AT 1800 JULY 15. THE AMERICAN DAY RECEPTION WILL BE 2030-2200 JULY 20. IT SHOULD BE BORNE IN MIND, HOWEVER, THAT OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS WILL BE PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO ARRANGE DURING FAIR PERIOD WHICH ENDS AUGUST 1.

3. DOLS 20 MILLION AID COMMODITY LOAN COULD BE READY FOR SIGNATURE IN LATE JULY. SYRIAN AND USAID WORK ON THIS LOAN HAS BEEN COMPLETED AND ONLY REMAINING STEPS ARE FINAL AID/W APPROVAL AND 15 DAY CONGRESSIONAL NOTIFICATION. NORMAL SIGNATORIES WOULD BE USAID DIRECTOR RAMSEY AND MINSTATE FOR PLANNING HOURANIYAH.

4. TALCOTT'S ARRIVAL AND PRESENTATION CEREMONY IS THE ONLY OTHER BILATERAL EVENT I CAN THINK OF AT THE MOMENT.

5. NONE OF THESE EVENTS OFFER A VERY PLAUSIBLE JUSTIFICATION FOR A VISIT BY THE SECRETARY, THOUGH THEY COULD EASILY FLESH OUT AND LEND BILATERAL COLORATION TO SUCH A VISIT. WHILE IN DAMASCUS HE WOULD WANT AND BE EXPECTED TO CALL ON ASSAD AND KHADDAM AND THESE TALKS WOULD INEVITABLY BE INTERPRETED IN A REGIONAL POLITICAL CONTEXT.

6. WE HAVE RECEIVED NO HINT HERE THAT SYRIANS MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN A VANCE VISIT. AS YOU KNOW, EDITORIAL FLOW OVER PAST WEEK HAS BEEN QUITE STONGLY AND SPECIFICALLY ANTI-US AND ANTI-SADAT EVEN MORE SO. SYRIANS APPEAR AS CONVINCED AS EVER THAT SADAT INITIATIVE IS GOING NOWHERE AND THAT ASSAD-SADAT RECONCILIATION IS PREMATURE. WHILE I COULD WELL IMAGINE THAT ASSAD WOULD LIKE TO HAVE AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH THE SECRETARY ON
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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS AND BELIEVE SUCH AN EXCHANGE WOULD BE EXTREMELY USEFUL AT THIS TIME, I DO NOT BELIEVE ASSAD WOULD FEEL ABLE TO ACCEPT VISIT BY THE SECRETARY IN CONTEXT OF HIS VISITS TO ISRAEL AND EGYPT.

7. IF THERE IS A SERIOUS POSSIBILITY THAT THE SECRETARY MIGHT INCLUDE SYRIA IN A JULY ME TRIP, WOULD SUGGEST WE SOUND OUT SARG INFORMALLY AT WORKING LEVEL (WALKER-SIAGE) AS A FIRST STEP. AM CONFIDENT SIAGE COULD GET US AN ACCURAT HIGH-LEVEL REACTION AND THIS SORT OF APPROACH WOULD AVOID THE EMBARRASSMENT WHICH OCCURRED OVER THE LAST ATHERTON VISIT PROPOSAL.
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